ROUGH DRAFT

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ENG 201

4/3/16

The Rhetoric Behind Different Diets/Eating Habits

We all do it on a daily basis—we can’t live without it. It is the bane of our existence, and has always been a somewhat taboo topic to speak on. Food. The nutrients we put into our body that fuels our being and essentially makes up what we are. Without food, we are nothing. To many people throughout history, as well as many even today, food meant whatever today’s work can buy, or whatever they could get their hands on. Those who cannot afford various types of food may not see morality within their meals, as they may not have a choice. However, many people in developed countries *do* have this luxury of choosing their meals, but some still refuse to allow the topic of morality in. Many eat their food oblivious to where it came from, or how that meal affects the planet. Since the population of the earth is rapidly growing, there are more mouths in need of feeding. This has led to a factory farming world attempting to supply the extreme demand for meat. However, with this method of creating massive amounts of meat quickly, there lies many cruelties and non-environmentally friendly occurrences between the lines. The USDA reports that animals in the US meat industry produce 61 million tons of waste each year, which is 130 times the volume of human waste - or five tons for every US citizen (<https://www.organicconsumers.org/old_articles/Toxic/factoryfarm.php)>. Along with all that waste comes the methane that is released into the atmosphere that also damages our earth. Those methane levels reach much higher than the CO2 released by vehicles. This information is also no secret—the damage meat-eating diets do to our earth is evident. However, the rhetoric that surrounds vegans and vegetarians is typically very negative. Many people, even if not actively negative towards the lifestyles, still choose not to bring morality and ethics into their food *choices* (which they have the privilege of actually choosing). This is extremely prevalent in our society as vegans and vegetarians gain momentum, yet we still see this lasting stigma.

BACKGROUND AND PRIMARY RESEARCH

From my reading, I have found that the stigma around veganism is huge. The rhetoric that is involved with them is also trending towards the very negative side—and this is mainly on social media. A common joke persists—“Hey, how do you know if someone is vegan? Don’t worry…they’ll tell you” (Lee, M., *Vegan ChowHound*). This easily stems from the fact that those who usually choose a vegan lifestyle are typically those who consider themselves activists. Those that truly want to make a change, and aren’t afraid to voice their opinions. This is what has really given veganism a bad reputation, because so many people who are for animal rights are speaking loudly about it. However, why is this seen as such a negative thing? Why are people so against hearing the truth behind what is happening to our food before we eat it? As mentioned prior, food is a very taboo, age-old thing for many people and cultures. Meat is a sacred thing for many, and a staple in so many diets. My sources have seemed to decipher this hatred towards vegans stemming from people with die-hard food traditions and cultures they stand by. Whether they are avid hunters, farmers or meat is just a tradition (such as on thanksgiving, Christmas, or even St. Patrick’s day). Along with the reasoning behind many choosing to forgo the veganism movement, there is much data pointing towards the necessary change that needs to happen. One sources points out that Animal agriculture is responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, more than the combined exhaust from all transportation. (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.HTM)>

Also that Livestock and their byproducts account for at least 32,000 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO2) per year, or 51% of all worldwide greenhouse gas emissions. (<http://www.animalfeedscience.com/article/S0377-8401(11)00517-7/abstract)>

These numbers speak for themselves on the true damage that meat eating is doing, but has this knowledge actually made an impact on how people *think* and *speak* about veganism, even if they aren’t one?

(I have many more sources to add in)

SECONDARY RESEARCH METHODS AND FINDINGS

For my secondary research I conducted a survey that consisted of asking about people’s eating habits, along with their personal opinions on vegans/vegetarians, as well as what they have heard about them in recent years. Exactly 100 people participated in my study, and I was able to find that 99% of them were raised in a meat-eating household. However, only 78% of those same people still consider themselves to have a carnivorous diet. With 68% of the participants being of the ages 18-25, it truly shows how much the generations have slowly been realizing that there needs to be changes in the way we consume and create our food. I also found it very interesting to see that 63% of my participants highly respected the idea and efforts of vegetarian/vegans, but also said they don’t think they could ever participate. This means they are quite aware of what these activists are doing and why, but they choose not to partake for whatever reason. This is huge when it comes to the rhetoric behind these diet choices, because the more people that respect the lifestyle choices of vegans/vegetarians, the less hatred and negative-talk will surround them, adding to the lasting stigma.

While many of the participants did seem to respect the idea of veganism, there were also the few that thought the idea was crazy, and that those who chose that lifestyle were not properly advocating for it—whether it be by talking about it in excess, or pressuring people in a negative way to switch their eating habits. From my data I can conclude that the majority of my participants *do* see veganism in a good light—however, they are still aware that vegans do see a lot of hatred. They can see that veganism is typically done by those who are self-proclaimed activists, but also are really trying to make a difference. I believe that I did reach a wide-range of people that can be found on either side of the political parties, along with people of all age ranges.

DISCUSSION

After assessing both primary and secondary sources, it is clear to me that the negative rhetoric towards veganism/vegetarianism still *exists*, but it has much lessened in recent years, likely due to more people realizing the detrimental effects meat has on our planet. However, the extremists of veganism are still out there, and they are still causing many to believe that they are the whole—that all vegans are extreme animal rights activists that almost value animals over humans. However, this is not the case. The extremists are not the whole, and the stigma on veganism should not be dictated by the actions of those who are extreme in their ways. In order to truly make a difference, and help bring the eating habits of the world closer towards veganism, vegans need to work towards gaining more positive momentum, while positively educating people on the effects of animal agriculture. (I will also be adding more to this argument…but I would love suggestions on how to structure it!! Right now my main argument is that people are using extremists to represent the “whole” of veganism, and I am going to argue that that is not right. I also need to touch on this argument a bit more in other paragraphs)

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